**Effort, Grit or Insanity**

**by Eduardo Briceno, CEO Mindset Works**

If students are struggling, we want them to remain motivated, try harder, and stick with it. But what about the saying, "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result”?  If a student has tried to learn something, didn't succeed, tried the same thing again and again, and never felt progress, is he likely to think that trying yet again will yield results? And is that motivating or demotivating?

George Washington had a lot of grit. He led the Continental Army during the American Revolutionary War when the British army had much greater resources, and more and better-trained soldiers. It took grit to lead the Continental Army for eight years and eventually win the war. But George Washington also sometimes quit, which seems at odds with having grit. He went into battles aiming to win, but when things weren't working in his favor, he sometimes decided to retreat. He would give up the near-term goal of winning the battle because he realized that pursuing that goal would yield large losses in the American army, thereby compromising the more important, long-term goal of gaining independence. He'd go back, regroup, think about a different strategy or tactic to try next, set a new goal, and go for it. If that didn't work, he'd try something else, always committed to the big aim. This is grit. It's the "perseverance and passion for long-term goals" (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007, p.1087).

Often, students and adults don't recognize the difference between effort and effective effort. If we say "try harder", "study more", or "stick with it", students may think that they need to sit in front of their assignment for more time, continuing to do the same thing that hasn't worked for them in the past, rather than finding a more effective strategy to achieve their goal, such as trying to solve a simpler problem in as many ways as possible, breaking down the task into smaller pieces, drawing a picture and showing it to someone for feedback, drilling down on mistakes to understand them, setting specific learning goals at the appropriate level of challenge, and asking for help, among many others. We need to teach effective learning strategies, and to encourage students to share strategies with one another.

Effective effort involves reflecting on our approaches to work smarter, which is needed to achieve different outcomes. Teaching that to students, along with effective learning strategies and the understanding that we can change our abilities (a growth mindset), motivates them, as it gives them a path to success.

The same is true of us as educators. Sometimes we forget the need to reflect on our overall approaches. If what we have done in our classrooms hasn't worked in the past, do we have the grit to stick with our goal of reaching all students? Will we put in the effort to reflect on our approaches, and learn about and try different strategies, until we find a way to achieve our big, hairy, audacious goal?

If we are aware of the distinction between effort and effective effort, and ensure students are too, we can all work together on building our self-management and learning competencies to maximize our progress. Students then come to understand that we're not asking them to pound their head against a wall, but to learn more effective ways to learn, with a growth mindset, and that we're here to support them and to improve with them along the way. That motivates them, and it empowers them with the learning competencies needed to thrive in school and in life.

What is more important for schools to do than to develop students as motivated and effective learners?

Reference

Duckworth, A.L., Peterson, C., Matthews, M.D., & Kelly, D.R. (2007). Grit: Perseverance and passion for long-term goals. Personality Processes and Individual Differences, 92 (6). Retrieved from: <http://www.sas.upenn.edu/~duckwort/images/Grit%20JPSP.pdf>